

BART STERN
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Bart (Berl) Stern was born in 1926 in Uzhhorod, Hungary which was then in Czechoslovakia and now part of Russia. His family had lived there for over 600 years. He was from a family of 7 children and 5 adopted children; his father was the honorary chairman of the Jewish Community there. After November 1938 many Polish Jews fled to the area and told horrible stories, but Bart's family felt it couldn't happen to them because they had lived in the area for so many centuries. But then the Germans took over from the Czechs and a variety of anti-Jewish laws came in existence and many houses and businesses taken away. The threat became real when the Polish Jews were rounded up and taken away. Also, his brothers had a hidden radio which was talking about the death camps.

In Spring of 1944 the Germans marched into the town and created 2 ghetto areas. Then the Jews began to be taken onto trains for "relocations" Bart was separated from his family and then was taken onto a railroad car to Birkenau. It took 3 days and many people died or committed suicide. There was no food and horrible conditions. After a few days in Birkenau Bart was sent to Auschwitz. He says the scene at the station was impossible to describe—elegantly dressed SS officers, Dr. Mengele, snarling dogs, the smell of burning flesh. He states the Ukrainian and Polish guards were worse than the Germans and killed for the fun of it. He describes a scene of seeing children pushed into burning trenches.

Bart was tattooed in Auschwitz and to this day refuses to have it removed because it reminds him and he is proud to be Jewish. At Auschwitz he was separated from 3 remaining brothers and was sent to work in a coal mine run by illiterate Poles. He describes the horrible conditions. He tells of one incident when a non-Jewish Pole ran away and in response 10 Jews were hung up by their feet and set on fire.

Bart became very ill and was sent to the infirmary where he was helped by a Dr. Cohen. Then he was sent back to Birkenau to be gassed with the other "musselmen". The term used for the almost dead. Bart was 83 pounds. At that time a Professor Epstein saved his life by telling him to go to a work detachment with some others. Because of this he didn't go on the death march, where he lost the last of his brothers. When the Russians liberated the camp on January 27, 1945 Bart was able to help them because he knew Russian and could read maps. He describes going into a nearby town where the Poles threw grenades, He grabbed a machine gun off a dead German and said he went "berserk" and killed many Poles.

He speaks of seeing Dr. Epstein in Prague after the war, who had become a top Pediatrician there. Bart talked about why he has remained Orthodox. His wife is also a survivor, but was very little during the war.